



LEADER OF THE OPPOSITION THE HON. TONY ABBOTT MHR FEDERAL MEMBER FOR WARRINGAH

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE HON. TONY ABBOTT MHR PRESS CONFERENCE, PARLIAMENT HOUSE, CANBERRA

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EO&E.....

TONY ABBOTT:

What I want to do now is directly address the people of Australia about the choice which now faces our country. At last, the choice is yours. It's not the choice of the caucus. It's not the choice of the faceless men. It's your choice about the government you have, about the Prime Minister you have and the choice couldn't be clearer. The choice is between the positive plans of the Coalition and more of the same under the Australian Labor Party and Mr Rudd.

I am determined, my team is determined, to build a better Australia, with specific improvements that we will deliver. We will build a stronger economy so that everyone can get ahead. We will scrap the carbon tax. We will get the budget back under control. We will build the infrastructure of the future and we will stop the boats.

Now, Mr Rudd talked about, who do you trust? Well, it's really about, who is more fair dinkum? Who can you rely on to build a better future? The people who have been stable and consistent for the last three years or a government which has been wracked by division and dysfunction and which promises more of the same if it's re-elected.

Who do you think is more fair dinkum? The people who actually stopped the boats in the past, or the person who started them up again in 2008? The people who have actually delivered surpluses or the man who started the spend-a-thon which has got us into the fiscal position we're now in where the budget is blowing out by \$3 billion a week? The people who have been stable and united for three years of opposition, or a government which hasn't had the same policy from one week to the next and has given us over a little more than three years, two prime ministers, six small business ministers, five assistant treasurers and four ministers for immigration. That's the kind of thing that the Australian people will have to judge and I am happy to place myself in the judgment of the Australian people.

You've got to ask yourself, what are the real functions of government? Well, the functions of government are to deliver a stronger economy, to provide national security, and to build a stronger and more cohesive society. We will deliver a stronger economy by getting taxes down, we'll abolish the carbon tax, we'll abolish the mining tax and as soon as it's responsible there'll be a modest company tax cut.

We will get regulation down. We believe, based on the work of the Productivity Commission, that it's more than possible to deliver \$1 billion a year in red tape cost reduction particularly to small business. So if we get taxes down, if we get regulation down, then we can get productivity up. It's all very well talking about productivity, but you've got to have a plan to deliver it. The Coalition does. Our opponents don't.

We will deliver on border protection. We've done it before, we can do it again. And we won't simply rely on another country doing the job for us. Yes, we'll work with our friends and neighbours but we'll never rely on another country to do the job for us, because no-one is more committed to the welfare of the Australian people than the Australian Government and no-one should be more determined to help this country than the Australian Prime Minister. And we will deliver a stronger and more cohesive society with better services, with better schools, with better hospitals and they'll be better not simply because they'll be properly funded. They'll be better because we will trust you, the people, with more control over the schools that your children attend, and over the hospitals that you use and need whenever you are sick or in trouble.

One thing that I'm determined to do is build a country where no-one ever feels like a stranger, to build a country where the bonds of social solidarity, the bonds of community are stronger and stronger. One thing that's been most dismaying about the current government is their attempts to turn Australian against Australian, and, yes, when Mr Rudd came in, he said that divisive rhetoric would cease, but the first bit of legislation passed under Mr Rudd when he came back to the prime ministership was the legislation making 457 visas more difficult. Now, it's extraordinary that a government which has failed to stop people coming illegally to Australia by boat has tried consistently to demonise people coming to Australia legally and working and paying taxes from day one. You'll never find this kind of divisiveness from me. I am proud of Australia as an immigrant society. I am proud of the fact that people from all over the world have come here not to change us but to join us and that social solidarity will increase under a Coalition government.

Mr Rudd talks a lot about a strong economy and yet it's plain that this government has no plan to manage our economy, no plan whatsoever, and that was crystal clear on Friday when it was revealed that the budget balance has been deteriorating by \$3 billion a week since May, when it was revealed that our gross debt is skyrocketing towards \$400 billion and when it was revealed that the numbers of unemployed are marching towards 800,000. And what's Mr Rudd's solution to this? Three new taxes. Well, the last way to build a strong economy is to clobber people with taxes. You get a company car, there's a tax on you. You put your savings in the bank, there's a tax on you. You light up a tax on cigarette, there's a tax on you, and if this is what the government does before an election, just think what it would be like after an election.

So there is a clear choice, it is in the hands of you, the people and the question that you'll be weighing as you begin this election campaign – do you really want three more years like the last six? Do you really think that Australia needs another three years like this six years that it's just had? I know we are a great country, I know we are a great people, you know that too. There's almost nothing wrong with our country that wouldn't be improved by a change of government. That's what we need, a change of government.

Our best years are ahead of us but only if we seize our opportunities and one opportunity that we must seize is the opportunity to change the government.

I am ready, my team is ready, you've watched us for three years, you've seen the unity, you've seen the stability, you've seen the strength. We won't let you down.

There are two final observations that I just want to make. If you do want to change the government, there's only one way to do it and that's to vote for your local Liberal-National candidate. And there's a commitment that I want to give you – there will not be a minority government led by me. There will not be deals done with independents and minor parties under any political movement that I lead. Australia needs strong and stable government. We don't need another three years like the time we've just gone through, that's why it is so important as we face the future as a nation, to choose your Liberal-National candidate and his or her positive plans for the future.

QUESTION:

Mr Rudd in his opening statement said he was open to more – or actually wanted more than one debate during the campaign. Are you open to that, a negotiation on more than one traditional campaign debate?

TONY ABBOTT:

The short answer is yes. Brian Loughnane has already written to the Labor Party secretary about a series of debates and he'll be releasing that letter shortly.

QUESTION:

Mr Abbott, we hear that there are 200 election policy costings put in by the Coalition to the Parliamentary Budget Office on Friday. Shouldn't you have released more of your policy plans by now and do you commit, during the campaign, that you will release most of those 200 before the final week of the campaign so there can be full scrutiny during this election campaign?

TONY ABBOTT:

Well I am confident that there will be full scrutiny during this election campaign and I'm sure, David, that you and others will help to ensure that there is full scrutiny during this campaign. The public will know exactly what they will get from us. They will know exactly how much it will cost, they will know exactly how it is going to be funded because what I want to do is to re-establish the bonds of trust that should exist between a government and a people, between a prime minister and citizens and sadly those bonds of trust have been repeatedly broken by the current government, as recently as Friday – as recently as Friday – when the Government revealed that what had been put forward in the Budget just 10 weeks earlier was already hardly worth the paper it was written on and when the Government revealed that there would be a series of new detention centres for illegal boat arrivals built here in Australia when just a fortnight earlier Mr Rudd had said that every single illegal arrival by boat was going to PNG.

QUESTION:

Already the theme has emerged from the two leaders' statements that it is a question of trusting people on economic management. Mr Rudd suggests that you will cut further than he will and cost jobs. When will you be able to disclose what your full economic plan is and the costings for your plans?

TONY ABBOTT:

Well, in the course of this campaign, both sides will make a series of announcements and all of those announcements will no doubt cost money and at some point in the campaign both sides will release their consolidated fiscal statements. We will be releasing ours in good time before the next election but I want to assure you, Dennis, that all of the proposals that we put forward in this campaign will be fully funded, they'll be fully costed and they will leave the Budget starting point stronger under the Coalition than under the ALP.

QUESTION:

Mr Abbott, what's the purpose of the Commission of Audit then? Are you saying today that no matter what the Commission of Audit after the election finds, there won't be surprise job losses and cuts to services?

TONY ABBOTT:

We've already said that there will be a slimming down of the Commonwealth public sector payroll. The Commonwealth public sector payroll is some 20,000 stronger today than it was in 2007 and I don't think anyone would say there's been a commensurate improvement in the quality of government or in the quality of government services over the last six years. So, we've been open and upfront about the fact that government will be smaller under the Coalition. I don't think the people want big government, I think you want strong government, you want effective government, you want government that gets things done, not government that it's all talk and no action.

QUESTION:

You say that there would not be a minority government led by you, but what if horror of horrors we have another photo finish come September 8, does that mean that you will not negotiate at all and you will surrender government back to Labor?

TONY ABBOTT:

I am saying that I won't be doing deals with Independents and minor parties. I'm not going to lead a minority government and if there is hung parliament, there won't be a Coalition government led by Tony Abbott.

QUESTION:

Why do you think Australia has a triple A credit rating?

TONY ABBOTT:

It owes everything to the reforms of previous governments and let's give credit where it's due, reforms by previous Labor Governments, as well as reforms by the former Coalition Government. It owes everything to the reforms of those governments and almost nothing to the spending spree of the current Government. Yes, Mr Rudd can stand up and show us his chart and demonstrate that by comparison with some other countries, Australia's debt and deficit position is not so bad. But it's not what we've done, it's where we've started that makes the difference and this is where Mr Rudd's deterioration in the fiscal position has been on a scale to match the disasters of Europe.

QUESTION:

Mr Rudd argues that the outlook is stable, therefore he's argues it's not deteriorating?

TONY ABBOTT:

How can he say the outlook is stand when in his own economic update on Friday it was revealed that the budget position was deteriorating to the tune of \$3 billion a week? I mean, this was a massive admission of failure. An absolutely massive admission of failure, in the end, if you can't manage the Budget you can't run the country. Labor has admitted that on numerous occasions, what they said what they said to the Australian people effectively on Friday was that they can't manage the Budget and therefore they can't run the country.

QUESTION:

Kevin Rudd has accepted the *Sky News* invitation for a debate tomorrow night. Now, the election has started, that was always the prerequisite, can we lock you in as well?

TONY ABBOTT:

Well, as I said Brian has written to the Secretary of the Labor Party to propose a series of debates and there will be a series of debates.

QUESTION:

[Inaudible] tomorrow night?

TONY ABBOTT:

I think I've dealt with that one.

QUESTION:

In terms of the local Government referendum Kevin Rudd blames you partly for the lack of bipartisan support for the failure of that referendum to go ahead with this election. Do you accept at least part of the blame for that?

TONY ABBOTT:

We were happy to lend bipartisan support provided the whole referendum process was handled properly. And this Government mishandled it from start to finish. The Spigelman Report said that there wasn't the consensus for change that the case hadn't been made, the funding arrangement that this Government put in place was grotesquely one-sided the Government hasn't done the spade work with the State Governments to ensure that they were supportive of the change and finally they tried to ram the referendum bill through the Senate on a gag. Well, that's no way to change the constitution and I've always said if you're not sure vote no, so I think it's probably good that because of the time constraints this particular referendum is not going to go ahead.

QUESTION:

Do you think it's a problem that Australia won't be represent at the G20 at a leadership level or is it something we can [inaudible] on this occasion.

TONY ABBOTT:

It's really up to Mr Rudd how we are represented at the G20. I think it's very important that we make the most of our position in the world. I think Australia should never underestimate its heft in the world as depending upon where things are on any particular day as about the 12th largest economy, as a significant military power, as a country with global reach in many respects. We should be ambitious for what we can achieve, as a global country, as a global power. But in the end it's up to Mr Rudd how we are represented in the G20.

Thanks so much.

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